

TESTIMONY OF
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AUDUBON CONNECTICUT

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Audubon Connecticut, the state organization of the National Audubon Society, works to protect birds, other wildlife and their habitats through education, science and conservation, and legislative advocacy for the benefit of people and the earth's biological diversity. We own and manage more than 4,500 acres of land statewide. Through our network of nature education centers, protected wildlife sanctuaries and local, volunteer Chapters we seek to connect people with nature and inspire the next generation of conservationists.

Senator Harp, Representative Walker and honorable members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to comment on Governor Malloy's proposed FY 12-13 budget for Conservation and Development. I am here today to speak in **strong support** of funding for the **Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), and the Community Investment Act program** – all of which are critical to the continued health of our environment and economy in Connecticut.

The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection:

For the past few years, many of us in the environmental community have come before you to testify about the funding crisis facing the Department of Environmental Protection. You responded to that urgent message, and though increased levels of funding have not been available, I would like to begin my remarks today by **thanking you** for your hard work and support for this agency charged with ensuring that clean water, clean air, accessible open space and productive farmland remain central to our quality of life and to the vibrant outdoor and recreation-based economy in Connecticut.

Audubon **strongly supports** Governor Malloy's proposed budget for the new Department of Energy and Environment (DEEP) for FY12-13. We commend the Governor for supporting the key agency functions that safeguard our natural resources, help to create jobs and drive our economy.

Natural resource or outdoor-related recreation, and particularly wildlife-associated recreation is big business in our state. Connecticut is home to an incredible diversity of native wildlife and vegetation. This diversity of plant and animal life, along with the wild habitats essential for their survival, supports a thriving economic engine in our state.

Whether along the shoreline of Long Island Sound, in the forests of the Northwest Hills, boating along the Connecticut River or hiking in the fields of the northeast's Quiet Corner, Connecticut's diversity of wildlife is a significant economic driver.

The following information is based on a 2006 analysis of U.S. Census data regarding the economic impact of wildlife-related recreation.

Participation in Wildlife-Associated Recreation in Connecticut:¹

- Total including hunters, fishers, and wildlife watchers: 1.3 million
- Wildlife Watchers: 1.2 million
- Bird watchers 857,000
- Expenditures including equipment and trips: \$873 million
- Estimated Jobs Created² 9,835

For wildlife watchers, people whose principal motivation for spending or traveling is wildlife watching, expenditures include equipment and related items such as binoculars, cameras, wild bird food, membership in wildlife organizations, camping equipment, motor homes, trip-related expenditures such as for food, lodging, and transportation, and other items such as books, magazines, contributions, and land-leasing.

DEP remains an agency that has consistently been asked to do more with less. In 2008, the Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) reported that our state spends fewer tax dollars per capita than any other northeast state to protect its environment and take care of its parks.³ According to CEQ, corrected for inflation, the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) 2006 budget was roughly equivalent to its 1993 expenditures and the number of staff positions at the agency has shrunk to 1988 levels, as their overall responsibilities have grown. Since 2003, DEP has lost almost 10% of its staff and its number of inspections (dependent on staff availability and travel) has decreased by 60% since 1990 levels with a concomitant decrease in compliance among the regulated community.

Now is the time to prepare for the next 30 years of environmental protection and we respectfully request that the Appropriations Committee consider one area where a modest investment would yield a great return for Connecticut's residents:

Wildlife Conservation License Plate Program

¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. *2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*. 2008.

² a) U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau. *2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*. 2008. International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, National Wildlife Federation. *Fish and Wildlife Recreation: Boosting Our Economy*. Compiled from *2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. b) *Sportfishing in America*. 2002. c) *Economic Importance of Hunting in America*. 2002. International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

³ *Dreams Deferred: An Assessment of the Cost of Attaining Connecticut's Goals for State Parks and Environmental Protection*, A Special Report of the Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality, March 2008.

- Connecticut ranks roughly 48th in the nation in per capita spending on wildlife programs, yet more than 1 million state residents engage in and enjoy wildlife-related recreation. The majority of DEEP's program devoted to non-game wildlife - - those creatures that are not hunted or fished such as song birds, turtles, butterflies and bats - - is supported by federal funding that faces an uncertain future. Revenues from the Wildlife Conservation License Plate, unlike those from the Long Island Sound plate and Duck Stamp, continue to be diverted to the General Fund rather than placed in a separate wildlife conservation account. Though the end result may be the same on paper, the public now has no assurance that their contribution will be used to fund non-game wildlife conservation. We ask the Appropriations to restore the non-game wildlife account funded by the Wildlife Conservation License Plate, a step that will enable advocates to more successfully promote sales of this plate and provide off-budget funding for DEEP.

On behalf of Audubon Connecticut, I ***strongly urge*** the Appropriations Committee to support Governor Malloy's funding levels for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Each dollar invested in this agency yields a major return on investment for all Connecticut residents.

The Council on Environmental Quality:

For more than 30 years, Connecticut's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) has been a watchdog monitoring our state's environment. CEQ analyzes the function of our environmental agencies, investigates citizen complaints about pollution and other environmental hazards, and reports on our progress in making Connecticut a cleaner, safer place in which to live and raise a family. Audubon Connecticut ***strongly opposes*** any elimination of function, expertise and independence of CEQ, something that cannot be assured if the agency is simply merged into the DEEP.

The Council is composed of nine volunteer members and two paid staff members. On an annual budget of **less than \$200,000**, CEQ monitors and reports on the status of the state's environment each year, reviews and approves construction plans proposed by other state agencies, and investigates citizen complaints about violations of environmental statutes and regulations.

Audubon Connecticut strongly urges the Appropriations Committee to ensure that function and independence of CEQ are retained in the FY12-13 budget.

CEQ's special reports - - possible only because the Council is an independent agency not staffed by DEP - - have brought significant issue to light and spurred key environmental legislation. Some examples include:

- Conserving open space
- Improving Connecticut's Environmental Policy Act
- Effort to preserve farmland, open space, historic assets, promote brownfields redevelopment and create affordable housing

- Keeping protected lands protected
- Funding and staffing of DEP
- Progress toward conserving inland wetlands

Some Examples:

In 1997, a special report by the Council showed how Connecticut lagged behind the region in preserving open space. The legislation and programs that resulted have greatly increased the number of acres of protected open space lands statewide over the past 14 years.

In 2002, the Council analyzed the threat of invasive plants to Connecticut's natural landscape in a special report. In 2003, the General Assembly passed legislation on invasive plants that enacted many of CEQ's recommendations and create a coordinated statewide effort to eliminate this threat to native habitat. In December 2005, the Council issued a report on threats to Connecticut's preserved lands that resulted in the passage of P.A. 06-89 *An Act Concerning Encroachment on Open Space Lands* last session.

CEQ was also at the center of a successful effort to improve the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act, a key state law requiring environmental review of state-funded projects. CEQ provided a forum where business, environmental and state agency representatives could discuss problems and devise solutions in a constructive fashion. This work resulted in significant savings for the state. Changes to the Policy Act will result in some agencies preparing fewer environmental assessments for proposed projects. **Each assessment averages more than \$100,000, so reducing the number of reports will save more than CEQ's annual budget many times over.**

Improvements to the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) in 2002 also gave CEQ a new responsibility that they fulfilled despite a 50% reduction of staff the first few years of its implementation. **The Environmental Monitor** now goes electronically to every city and town in the state notifying them of details and deadlines associated with state projects undergoing CEPA review. Agencies can post their information on a web site created and maintained by CEQ staff.

Recent reports highlighting the the budget crisis at DEP and the need to improve inland wetlands conservation in our state have all had similar impacts on efforts to protect the state's environment and enhance our natural resources.

Public outreach:

CEQ also continues to hold **public forums** around the state to hear citizen concerns and complaints. This outreach allows CEQ to identify emerging problems and relay them to appropriate agencies. Without resorting to costly litigation, CEQ provides a venue for citizens to express concerns about Connecticut's environment.

Invaluable information:

CEQ's Annual Report has long been a reliable reference regarding the status of key environmental indicators – relied up by other agencies (including DEP), state and federal lawmakers, municipal officials, journalists, academics and individual citizens. The continuity, reliability and integrity of this 30 year database makes it an invaluable reference. Information about each year's report can be accessed at <http://www.ct.gov/ceq/cwp/view.asp?a=1008&q=248732>.

The CEQ is one of the smartest and most cost-effective parts of our state government. Its services and data are invaluable in assessing the success (or failure) of our environmental initiatives and programs. It is essential that the function and independence of CEQ be retained. The last time elimination of CEQ was proposed, then-DEP Commissioner Gina McCarthy was asked if her agency would be able to do everything the Council is required to do. Her reply was that given available appropriations, which have only declined in intervening years, the agency would not be able to provide substantial staff to the Council beyond scheduling meetings and publishing the online Environmental Monitor. With no staff available, the essential investigative and public outreach functions of CEQ would end.

It cannot be stressed enough: CEQ's function is not to monitor the Connecticut DEP. It is to monitor the State of Connecticut's environment and provide impartial, reliable, and regular reports about whether we are reaching our goals of providing a safe, clean and healthy future for all. **This is one watchdog we need to keep on the job.**

A healthy environment is essential to a healthy economy in Connecticut. Audubon looks forward to working with the Appropriations Committee to address any questions or concerns you may have about funding for the DEEP or CEQ. We appreciate your efforts safeguard our clean water, clean air and the other natural resources that support Connecticut's outdoor recreation and wildlife-based economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these important matters today.

